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SUBJECT: DOCKWORKERS STAND DOWN ON PLANNED STRIKE

11. (SBU) Summary. The planned strike by dockworkers across Nigeria scheduled for December 1 was put on hold as GON and labor officials negotiated severance packages for over 6,000 dockworkers expected to be laid off as part of the GON's ports concessioning exercise. After a November 30 stakeholders' meeting chaired by the Finance Minister, the GON conceded that dockworkers should be paid severance benefits. Maritime Workers Union President Irabor said all planned strikes are suspended until after December 9 when the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) and GON reconvene to finalize dockworkers' severance packages. End Summary.

12. (SBU) The dockworkers branch of the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria (MWUN) had threatened to shut down various ports to protest the GON's refusal of their demand for severance benefits. The Union request totals naira 4 billion (USD 30.8 million); about naira 580,000 (USD 4,462) per retrenched worker, Nigerian media reported. MWUN President Onikolaese Irabor told us December 2 the naira 4 billion figure reported by the media was inaccurate, and that their organization had demanded a much higher severance package, but that he could not reveal the true figure because the NLC was still negotiating this with the GON. However, he did concur with media reports that dockworkers had planned to frustrate port concessionaires' smooth takeover of the ports, if the GON did not meet their demands.

13. (SBU) Irabor said that in a November 30 Abuja meeting, the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) raised serious concerns over dockworker severance packages with representatives of the ministries of finance, labor, transport, and defense. He said the MWUN was "satisfied" with the results of the November 30 meeting, but that not all financial and legal matters were concluded. He hoped severance package issues would be resolved during their follow-up meeting with the GON on Friday, December 9.

14. (SBU) Comment: Senior members of the NLC pledged that no strikes would occur and no ports would be shut down. There is no reason to believe that a strike would occur unless the December 9 negotiations break down. Irabor seemed content with the discussions the NLC had with various GON ministries regarding severance packages, although he would not discuss concrete figures. When pressed, he told us privately that naira 600,000 (USD 4,615) per retrenched worker would be "fair", although he qualified it by stating it would depend upon work experience and position. End Comment.

BROWNE